

12mo

D99082251-

#320

S.C.

September 12th, 1863.

To Gov. M. L. BONHAM.

SIR: It is natural that I should address a communication, treating of a matter in which the State has a deep interest, to you, the official head of the State.

"There is a time to be silent, and a time to speak." Lately it would have been treason to point out publicly the weak point in the defences of Charleston. That enjoined silence. Now, unhappily, there is no danger of betraying to the enemy how they may approach it. That allows free speech.

It may be of use to the people of South Carolina, even at this late day, to know the causes that have enabled the enemy to make progress in the siege: whether it be by their superior force and armament; or from the deficiency of our troops in number and quality; or the indefensible nature of our position; or the want of materials of war; or insufficient labor employed in the construction of defensive works; or else from incapacity in the use of these means of defence. Whatever be the cause of our ill-success so far, it is time that we should know it. The knowledge will not come too late to be useful. In order to add something to the facts, on which the people of the State may base a sound conclusion on this point, I make the following statement:

In November, 1860, I was charged by Gov. Gist with some of the first measures of military preparation. I had myself advised them, being convinced that secession must lead to war. Among other duties I was directed to make a topographical examination of all those points which had a military bearing on Forts Sumter and Moultrie, and on the defence of the harbor. On this occasion, I advised the occupation of Morris' Island with a strong force in men and guns, as soon as that force could be got ready; and also the occupation of the Eastern half of Sullivan's Island with a similar force. Fort Moultrie, with its scanty garrison, was for certain reasons, capable of little resistance, and could be easily taken when the State seceded, and we thus acquired

a right to it. I was soon after employed by Gov. Pickens in some similar duties, and again took occasion to urge the occupation of Morris' Island with a strong force.

My reasons for laying so much stress on the occupation of both of these islands were these: The first object to be aimed at in defending Charleston should be to prevent the enemy from uniting their land and sea forces in one attack. By so fortifying Morris' and Sullivan's Islands, that they could not get a footing on either, an attack on the harbor could be made only by their fleet. This we might well hope to repel. There was no reason for fortifying the Eastern end of Sullivan's Island, where Fort Marshall stands, that did not apply equally strongly to the Southern end of Morris' Island. The construction of Fort Sumter, which was merely a brick tower, easily damaged by a cannonade, and not easily reparable like an earth-work—in short, a fortress of the castle kind, which the use of cannon had abolished in war, except for some special purposes—rendered it essential that it should not be exposed to the continuous and accurate fire of land batteries.

If after we had secured these islands, the enemy had attempted to approach Charleston with their land forces, either across James' Island or through St. Andrew's Parish, or, what is most unlikely, by Charleston Neck, they must soon have left their ships behind them, and lost the support of their naval force. We could then have opposed their advance with good hope of success. For these reasons the all-importance of Morris' and Sullivan's Islands was obvious to me.

As soon as Major Anderson moved into Fort Sumter I advised Gov. Pickens immediately to seize upon Castle Pinckney and Sullivan's Island; and a day or two after suggested the building of a battery on Sullivan's Island, beyond the range of Fort Sumter's guns, to command the Maffit Channel; and another on Morris' Island, to command the Ship Channel. Major Walter Gwinn and myself received jointly an order to select the sites of these batteries; and a few days after the Governor sent me to lay out the battery on Morris' Island. This was a small work hastily thrown up to cover the only three guns we had ready for that service. A few days after, it fired upon the Star of the West.

Not long after this the corps of Engineers was formed, and many officers from the United States army entering the service of the State, I was no longer called upon by the Governor for services of this kind. Not having obtained any permanent military position, and being the

only member of the Board of Ordnance resident in Charleston, I devoted my time to assisting the Colonel of Ordnance. We were at this time alarmingly behind-hand in ordnance preparations, and did not know how soon we would have to open our batteries on Fort Sumter. My connection with these preparations gave me a good opportunity of knowing what was going on.

When we had taken Fort Sumter, or rather when Major Lerson had given it to us by leaving a combustible roof standing next to our fire, I was astonished to see Gen. Beauregard turn his ~~k~~ ^a on Morris' Island, not leaving a man or a gun on it, as if it ~~were~~ consisted no longer important to us. A gentleman, then holding an important position in the service of the State, expressed even more astonishment than I did.

In the summer of 1861, when Dupont and Sherman's expedition was fitting out in New York, I wrote to Gov. Pickens, then absent from Charleston, representing that Morris' Island was still unoccupied; that the enemy might throw a large force upon it in a single calm night or day; that the island would be an impregnable fortress in their hands; that the possession of it would enable them to reduce Fort Sumter speedily; and that our forces about Charleston would be mere spectators of the siege. The Governor at once called Gen. Ripley's attention to this matter. His only reply is said to have been a jest, not worth repeating here.

When General Lee was sent to this Department, and was about to visit the posts on and near James' Island, Gov. Pickens presented me to him, and told him that I would accompany him the next day in order to call his attention to a locality important to the defence of Charleston. I went with him, in company with two officers. But although we were out thirteen hours, moving by land ~~and water~~, his attention was so incessantly engrossed by the officer who acted as his guide, that it was late in the day before I got a brief opportunity of urging upon him the importance of Morris' Island, the ease with which the enemy might seize upon it, and the consequences. I urged the facility with which we might hold and fortify the southern, which is the stronger end, the sea front being covered and naturally fortified by a range of high and abrupt sand hills, with a heavy wood behind them. He abruptly asked me, "With what force would you hold the position?" I answered, hastily, "A thousand men." He replied— "We have not the troops. You gentlemen must exert yourselves to raise troops. That is what is wanting."

I was since. He plainly wished to hear no more of the matter. I ought to have persisted, and urged that what troops we had should be posted the most important points, and that until he had visited Morris' Ind, and especially the southern end, he was not master of the posis necessary for the defence of the harbor. But the fact was thatn. Lee had been totally deceived as to the state of military preparatin South Carolina. He found so many essentials neglected, and so v useless things done, at an immense cost and labor, that he cond as well as disappointed. So many futile suggestions and ~~pro~~^{as} ever had been pressed upon him, that it was difficult to fix his attention on any new matter. Certain it is that he did not stay here long enough to solve the problem of the defence of Charleston.

Gen. Pemberton soon succeeded Gen. Lee in this Department. A member of his Staff, to whom I had spoken fully on the importance of Morris' Island, told me that he had spoken earnestly to the General on this matter. I made no attempt myself to call his attention further to it. I could hope nothing from him; for I had seen him in wanton ignorance order the abandonment of the important post commanding Georgetown Inlet, he never having been within fifty miles of it; laying open the richest grain region of the State to a contemptible force of the enemy, thus literally inviting devastation; and that too against the clearest demonstration of the ease with which a small force could protect it against any expedition likely to be sent into the intricate and shallow waters of that inlet.

At length Fort Pulaski was taken. This half waked up some of our officers. The possibility that Morris' Island commanded Fort Sumter, and not Fort Sumter Morris' Island, as some men high in the army had asserted, dawned upon their minds. Gen. Pemberton was induced by one or two engineer officers to authorize the building of Battery Wagner—thus taking hold of the island in a small way by the wrong end. Had the labor thrown away on Cole's Island, and the many heavy guns formerly mounted there, been judiciously employed near the south end of Morris' Island, we would have had a fort capable and worthy of defence.

On Gen. Beauregard's return to Charleston, I made no attempt to induce him to fortify the south end of that island, for several reasons. I had been abundantly obtrusive of my opinion for one who was not officially entitled to give it. Gen. Beauregard was of all men most bound to know the value of Morris' Island. Moreover, I was at that time (September, 1862) sent by the gentleman at the head of the military officers

of the State to urge the General to correct the error committed by Gen. Pemberton in giving the country around Georgetown to the enemy before they had ever asked for it. I was to urge Gen. B. to reoccupy South Island (an island more in name than fact), and thus deprive the enemy of a harbor, the discontented negroes on the eastern coast of a place of refuge where they could join the enemy, and at the same time to protect a region which produced grain to feed 90,000 persons, the cultivation of which would otherwise have to be abandoned, and the produce of which was necessary to the maintenance of any considerable number of troops east of Charleston. The enemy's force consisted of a few slightly built steamers, which had always kept carefully out of the range of our guns. Five hundred men and eight or ten guns was all the force needed for this purpose. Gen. Beauregard, who like Gen. Pemberton, had never been within fifty miles of South Island, shewed, in my short conference with him, his ignorance of the country and the objects to be attained. He refused to take the step proposed, but afterwards adopted a poor substitute for it, establishing a post in a most sickly spot, leaving the harbor to the enemy, and the road open to the negroes for free resort to them. Seeing this confidence in his own judgment, based on no knowledge of the country, and the little value he put on the local knowledge of others, it would have been idle in me to speak to him of Morris' Island.

Besides my efforts to call the attention of the Generals to this matter, I have labored to prove its importance to many individuals, who I supposed had the ear of the Generals, and more address than I had in urging their views. It will seem a strange thing to say, but it is my belief that neither Generals Lee, Beauregard nor Pemberton ever was at the south end of Morris' Island, nor was ever any consideration given to it until the late absurd attempt to drive the enemy by ~~a few~~ shells off of Folly Island.

The blindness of our enemies was quite equal to that of our Generals. For more than two years a strong squadron lay at anchor off Morris' Island. Our enemies were racking their brains to devise the means of assaulting us, yet no one saw the prize before them, until we began to fortify it against them.

By the solid resistance of Battery Wagner to the progress of the enemy, after they had possession of nine-tenths of the island, and could push their works up almost to the ditch, we may estimate the insuperable nature of the obstacle they would have met in proper works near the southern end. Protected in a great measure from the

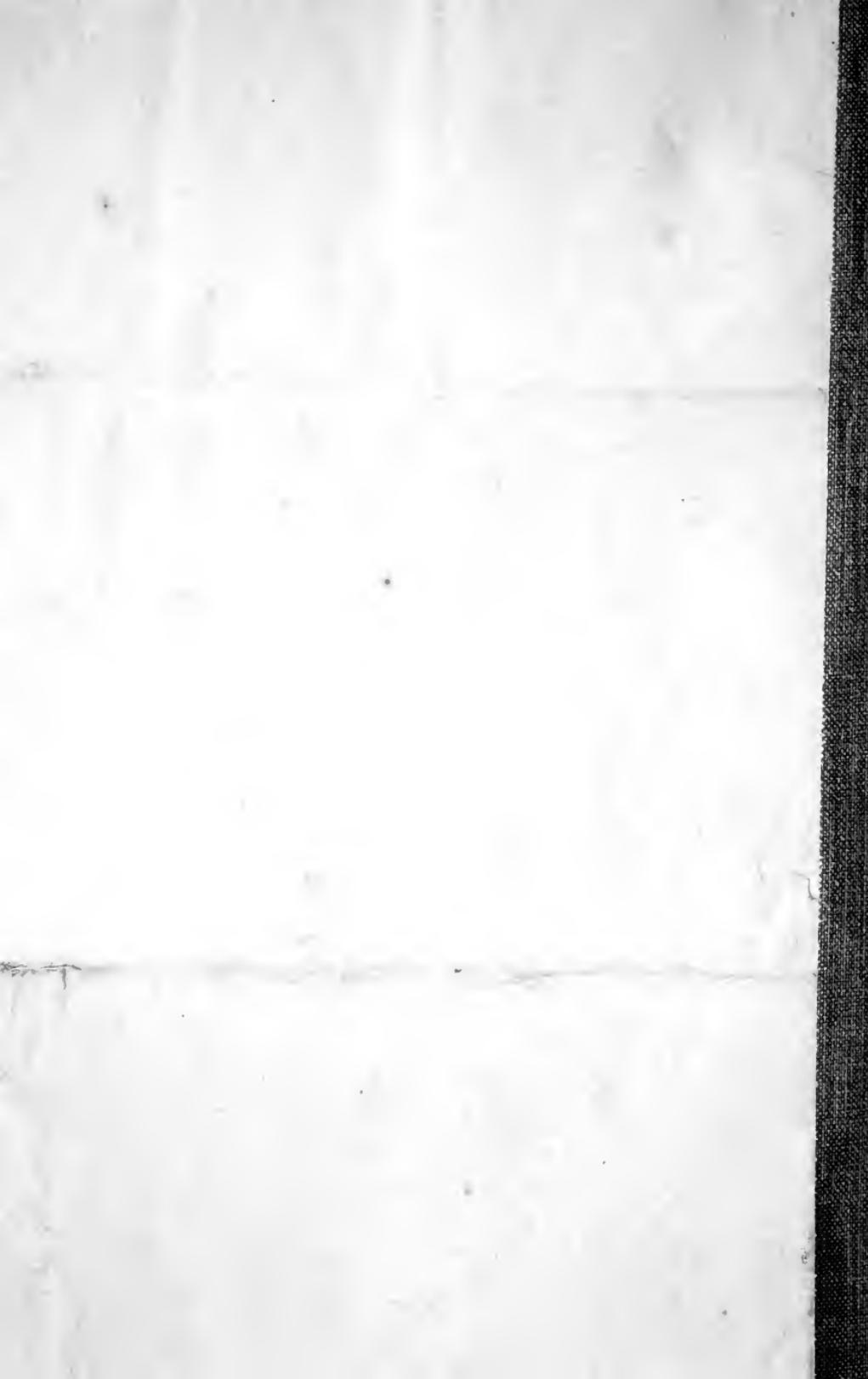
fire of the enemy's ships, by the character of the ground, and separated from their nearest batteries by an inlet of some width, and by several hundred yards of flat sands, we could there have defied assault. Fort Marshall thus protects the eastern end of Sullivan's Island. Where was the eye of the Engineer and the General when the corresponding position of Morris' Island was overlooked?

When I review the history of the military operations around Charleston, I am forced to conclude that it is not the superior force and armament of the enemy that have so far commanded success of late. Nor is it from any deficiency in our troops. We have always had at hand an abundant force to maintain all the posts necessary for the defence of the harbor; and as to their conduct, it has not only been vastly superior to that of the enemy, but we could not have desired them to display more courage, and devotion to their duty. Neither has there been a deficiency of ordnance and other material, though we were not as well provided as the enemy. Nor has it been from the indefensible nature of our position. Nor has there been a want of labor to fortify that position. The works for miles around Charleston witness how freely labor has been furnished. Some of that labor has been idled away. Much has been expended on work that proved useless. Some on works that are absolutely injurious. For instance, while Charleston was comparatively defenceless on its most accessible sides, elaborate works were thrown across Charleston Neck, as if the enemy, in a chivalrous spirit of fighting on equal terms, were going to leave behind them all their peculiar advantages of naval power and ponderous armament, and approach the city by the most circuitous and disadvantageous route. Were these lines built for the enemy? Should they ever take Charleston, there stand the lines ready built to their hand, to aid them in ~~mining~~ their conquest. If one-twentieth of the labor applied and misapplied about Charleston had been laid out where it was most wanted, we should have heard nothing of the want of labor, and little as to its misapplication.

Money, labor and materials have been freely furnished. A large force of excellent troops stand ready for the defence of Charleston, wherever their arms are available. But where has been the foresight anticipating contingencies, and that perception of the relative value of topographical features, which two qualities combined fit men for military command?

G. MANIGAULT.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2011 with funding from
Duke University Libraries



Hollinger Corp.
pH 8.5